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#### **Authors**

Moser, Christiana  
Tarakçı, Bahar  
Ünal, Ercenur  
[et al.](#)

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# A cross-linguistic investigation of possession-transfer and instrument events in language production

**Christiana Moser**

University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

**Bahar Tarakçı**

Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey

**Ercenur Ünal**

Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey

**Myrto Grigoroglou**

University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Abstract

As humans, we organize our daily experiences in terms of structured events. Events involve multiple participants (i.e., thematic roles), with different levels of linguistic and conceptual prominence. Here, we explore how thematic roles map onto language by investigating how speakers of two typologically different languages (English, Turkish) describe events that involve linguistically peripheral roles (Recipients, Instruments). To test how semantic prominence affects peripheral role mention, we included events that either ‘require’ or ‘allow’ Recipients and Instruments. To elicit naturalistic descriptions, speakers described the events to a familiar, naïve interlocutor. Results from our free description task showed that the require-allow distinction did not affect mention of Recipients and Instruments in either language. However, mention of highly optional event roles (i.e., allowed instruments) was affected by language-specific syntactic encoding options. We conclude that mention of participant roles in language is affected by factors beyond the cognitive salience of the roles.